

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1446

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: CHARRON REPLACES BURNS AS PARLIAMENTARY LEADER

REF: QUEBEC 0176

1. PRIME MINISTER LEVESQUE ANNOUNCED OVER THE WEEKEND THAT MINISTER OF YOUTH AND SPORTS CLAUDE CHARRON WILL REPLACE ROBERT BURNS AS PARLIAMENTARY LEADER FOR THE GOVERNMENT. CHARRON HAS BEEN ACTING PARLIAMENTARY LEADER SINCE LAST MAY, WHEN BURNS SUFFERED AN APPARENT HEART ATTACK. BURNS WILL RETAIN HIS POST AS MINISTER OF STATE FOR PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

2. COMMENT: THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT BURNS, WHO HAS FEUDED WITH LEVESQUE IN THE PAST, DID NOT STEP DOWN ENTIRELY OF HIS OWN FREE WILL, DESPITE HIS HEALTH PROBLEMS. LEVESQUE REFUSED TO CONFIRM TO REPORTERS THAT BURNS HAD ASKED TO BE RELIEVED OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LEADER JOB, SAYING ONLY THAT HE AND BURNS HAD "REACHED AGREEMENT" ON THE MATTER. BURNS, WHO HAS BEEN A MAJOR PQ FIGURE FROM THE BEGINNING, IS LIKELY TO FIND HIS REMAINING DUTIES QUITE LIGHT. BOTH THE ELECTORAL REFORM BILL (BILL 2) AND THE REFERENDUM BILL ARE NOW LAW, AND THERE IS RELATIVELY LITTLE LEFT

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ON THE MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY REFORM'S PLATE. CHARRON'S CONFIRMATION IN THE EXTREMELY DEMANDING JOB OF PARLIAMENTARY LEADER, ON THE OTHER HAND, MARKS HIS EMERGENCE AS AN IMPORTANT STAR IN THE PQ FIRMAMENT. ONLY 32 YEARS OLD, CHARRON HAS BEEN AN MNA SINCE 1970, REPRESENTING THE EAST END MONTREAL RIDING OF ST. JACQUES. NO PARTICULAR FAVORITE OF LEVESQUE'S DURING THE EARLY YEARS, CHARRON'S STOCK HAS RISEN DRAMATICALLY WITH THE PM

SINCE THE 1976 ELECTION, AND HE IS NOW A MAJOR ADVISOR AND
CONFIDANT REPRESENTING THE MORE RADICAL WING OF THE PARTY.
PINCHITTING FOR THE AILING BURNS DURING THE LAST CHAOTIC
WEEKS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION BEFORE THE SUMMER BREAK,
CHARRON PROVED UNFLAPPABLE AND ADEPT AT PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE,
AND SEEMED TO THRIVE ON THE PACE. HIS NOMINATION WILL SWEETEN
THE PILL SOMEWHAT FOR BURNS, SINCE THE TWO MEN ARE FRIENDS
FROM THE EARLY 70'S WHEN THEY WERE PART OF THE PQ'S THEN TINY
HANDFUL OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS.
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